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## Latino Water Coalition Will Take Part In Monday's Friant Dam Press Conference

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**C**alifornia Latino Water Coalition members will take part in a news conference Monday afternoon (January 17) at Friant Dam near Fresno. The event will take place against a backdrop of a San Joaquin River flood release taking place because of a lack of adequate capacity in which to store storm-generated high water runoff so it could be beneficially used by agriculture, communities and the environment during drier times.

The news conference will take place at **2 p.m. Monday, January 17**, at the base of Friant Dam, several miles northeast of Fresno in Friant.

Calling the news conference were a number of elected federal and state legislative leaders. Scheduled to participate are Congressman Jim Costa, State Senator Michael Rubio, and Assembly Members Henry T. Perea, Linda Halderman, M.D. and David Valadao. Other area legislators and local elected officials may attend. Also scheduled to take part are Tim Quinn, Executive Director of Association of California Water Agencies; Larry Westerlund, Fresno City Council member; Ronald D. Jacobsma, General Manager, Friant Water Authority; Mario Santoyo, Director and Technical Advisor, California Latino Water Coalition; Manuel Cunha, President Nisei Farmers League; Ryan Jacobsen, Executive Director, Fresno County Farm Bureau; Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) President Paul Kelley and Daniel Curtin, Director, California Conference of Carpenters.

Santoyo said the news conference will discuss flood releases that, while vital for safety, result in loss of valuable water supply to cities, agriculture and the environment.

"The problem is that existing above-ground water storage space in California, and especially Millerton Lake behind Friant Dam, cannot capture all excess flows caused by the sort of above-average storm activity we had in December," Santoyo said. Water storage development would be included in a November 2012 State of California Water Infrastructure Bond measure that is to be considered by voters. The news conference is also expected to include discussion on participation in finding solutions for the California water crisis by the federal government.

**M O R E**

Congressman Costa noted that the big December storms focused on Sierra Nevada watersheds in Central California. The San Joaquin River watershed was among those areas receiving the heaviest amounts of precipitation, between 12-19 inches over the course of several days. Extremely heavy snowfall occurred at higher elevation. Runoff from heavy lower elevation rainfall and mid-elevation snowmelt, coupled with an obviously large snowpack that still has more than half of its normal season to accumulate, has prompted flood releases.

Santoyo said Millerton Lake, behind Friant Dam, is far too small at 520,500 acre-feet of storage to adequately manage all San Joaquin River runoff even in average water years, let alone anticipated runoff from amounts of mountain rain and snow such as are being experienced this winter.

As a result, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on December 23 began a flood release from Friant Dam that gradually was increased to 6,000 cubic feet per second to evacuate storage from Millerton Lake. By January 13, the flood release was decreased to just under 3,000 c.f.s. and today (January 14) was cut again to 1,850 c.f.s. because of this month's return to dry weather and a resumption of deliveries to the Friant-Kern Canal following weeks of scheduled canal maintenance work.

Still, because of a lack of available storage, well over 100,000 acre-feet of San Joaquin River water has already been lost to beneficial use by farmers and communities along the valley's East Side, and to environmental purposes – including salmon restoration – along the lower San Joaquin River.

This is not an isolated occurrence. Over the past 30 years, insufficient water storage has resulted in a loss of more than 14 million acre feet to the ocean, averaging approximately 450,000 acre-feet annually (or three years' worth of water supply for the City of Fresno). The last major flood release, in 2006, resulted in more than 1.2 million acre-feet of water, nearly twice the capacity of Millerton Lake, being discharged to the ocean because there was no place to store it. San Joaquin River flood releases are not unusual even in average or slightly below-normal water years.

“The Sierra snowpack water content in several locations is already at or above its peak average accumulation for the entire season, and that level is expected to occur on April 1,” Santoyo said. “We are only half way through the snow accumulation season and will not begin to receive river runoff forecasts until next month but it seems probable that flood releases of some magnitude may continue, especially if significant storm activity resumes.”